

WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2004

## NO MORE SUPER-SIZING:

SIZING the Biennial

Tony Zaza (The Roving Eye)

Once in a while an art exhibit comes along that can shake your worldview, alter sensitivities, engage you in a new aesthetic dialogue, define new artistic directions. The Whitney Biennial 2004 is NOT that kind of show. To be sure, the show has good intentions. It will ennoble and perhaps even astound the suburban clientele who simply do not have either the time or the inclination to go discover art in a variety of places. Nevertheless, this is a show hung with reckless abandon (the Whitney is a tough hang) but with the enthusiasm and vitality of a Kindergarten art expo by excited children whose vision cannot go beyond Chelsea.

Just pile everything up in the middle of the gallery, seems to be the curatorial strategy. This is a show of the window dresser's art. One searches for a spark of inspiration and finds plastic crafts and component video\*. Overall, the feel of the exposition leaves you with more of a sense of gay pride than a sense of artistic innovation.

Most of the works are centered on the quite narrow confines of what has been hung over the past two years in various Chelsea district art galleries, and the selections are rather blind to work of artists over 40. It's like a discography of top ten hits, labeled with kindness and reverence but smelling of self-indulgence and nepotism.

Dutifully and with comic aplomb, the Whitney has assembled a broad array of peculiar individualized works that reveal the prejudices of a minority of art gallery owners and their hapless gallerinae. If this appears harsh and uncompromised, it is because it's time for this artist-gallery-museum buddy system of self-con-gratulatory indiscriminate self-expression to be healed. It's a disease of the unworthy. Not everything or everyone deserves exposure. For those less versed in the daily ins and outs of the art world, the Biennial is received with some trust that wise and just decisions have been made. For artists, it is an atrocity of unbounded repercussions, not the least of which is establishment of a false trend that simply lacks both worth and significance.

On the other hand, no American art institution tries so hard to create a balance between an unenlightened public and an over self-indulgent artist/gallery community.

The few and the far-between that stick-in-the-mind: Cecily Brown's *Black Painting 2*, oil on linen, what a refreshing concept. A recollection of the passion of setting paint to canvas. / Jim Hodges' *A View from Here*, glass wall sculpture-like, a found object in granny's attic that bestows fantasy musings. / Elizabeth Peyton, *Live to Ride*- 15' x 12' oil portrait. Shockingly anachronistic and unflinchingly unpretentious, more primordial than primitive. / Dario Robleto's *At War with the Entropy of Nature/Ghosts Don't Always Want to Come Back*, unimaginable how the spectator could ever decode the artists' invention. / Tam Van Tran, *Beetle Manifesto IV*, forces a second take-then a disappointment of the intellect. / Olav Westphalen's *Statue*-finally some figures with personality. ~